

The Vellum Notes

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Day 2 since awaking:

I am still alive. For that I may rejoice. But I do not know how many days have passed. For that I mourn.

I remember writing my last daily entry in my journal and hiding it in a hollow tree. I labeled the entry 22,999, but I don't remember what I said. I wonder where that was.

Alas! but forgetfulness is dreadful! I am glad I am not a human; I hear they forget all the time.

I am somewhere in a beech forest. I'm safe now, on quite stable footing, though I am pretty threadbare; hopefully, I can contrive some sort of descent clothing before I meet any people. Hides are alright for writing on, but not presentable as clothing.

I spent many hours feeling for minds, and located one I recognize; I can't remember where I recognize it from. I do hope it isn't one of the ones that was chasing me. I think (I hope) I ate all of them. But I can't remember.

Day 3 since awaking:

Half way there, unless it is a very strong mind. It is a very strong mind, of course, but I mean a truly gargantuan mind. I think it is the mind of a woman, a human woman. The only human woman's name I can remember is Scarlet.

Who is Scarlet?

Day 4 since awaking:

There are three of them; I saw them today, but they are moving very fast. There is one glass howler and two children; one looks to be about 25 and the other maybe 15. The little one is the one I recognized, but I couldn't reach her. I remember the way she flies, though, and I almost remember flying with her. There was an ogre involved, I think (or was it a cyclops?), and my lower right tentacle was lost. Also some birds and writing in the air. I think there was a face behind the writing, too.

I started to follow them on foot, but a whole troupe of giants came through. I cannot fathom the size of them! I doubt I could reach much above their knees. They move fast, though, and follow the trail well. At least I don't have to worry about dealing with bracken and stuff any-

more; they leave quite the swath in the brush.

For some reason, I think the mind—she is not Scarlet; Scarlet was an old mind—knows the giants, but I have no reason to think so.

I need to go hunting tonight; this hide is too full to write much more.

Day 5 since awaking:

The giant troupe has stopped, but it will take me at least a day to catch up. The humans are quite a bit further on, I think, and there are three of them now. Also another mind, I think, or two, but it is hard to know. Maybe it is just the howler.

I am afraid to meet the giants. Their minds are small, but they are huge, and I cannot remember anything about them at all. Ogrelons and wyverns are one thing; at least I know how to deal with them. But these things; I would almost swear I had no idea they existed, except then I can't remember so much! Ah, the pain of forgetfulness!

I wonder what made me forget. I have only snatches. I remember running, running, always running. I remember people flying, like the older girl flies now, yelling, fighting. And runes! They are burned on my retina, surging through my mind, blocking out so much! They burn like truth, but they cover so much I cannot believe them. When I try to think what sort of thing I am, they sear like brimstone, yelling in my mind that I don't exist, that I am a joke, a farce, a mistake. When I try to remember what I have been and done, they spark and spit and cloud my mind. Never again let me see such runes! And yet, I know I will always see them.

But as I look at them, as I focus my mind on them, I see other things. I see children, small children, no more than teenagers, crowded in a school house, staring at me with wide eyes. I see a stuffy, dark room, filled with people; there is one I see who I almost recognize, but another, blazing like fire, sometimes a man and then again a rune, blocks my sight and I see the room no more.

I feel like crying.

Day 6 since awaking:

Walked all day. I'm quite near the giant's camp now,

but I won't be able to get past them until morning.

Day 7 since awaking:

In the night something found me. I would call it a giant, but it was so small compared to the other giants, I cannot. It had a great mind, but I could not feel the mind; it was like the mind of the mighty beech; you can tell it is there, but it is not like a normal mind.

It didn't talk at all. It wrote a little; it called me "Mr. Graves" and seemed to know much about me, more than I do. It told me I had visited it with something called "Cor" and wanted me to come with it, but it was going the wrong way. Away from the minds, away from the giants and the women. I told it they were there, but all I could say was "three minds, I know them." It looked at me with concern and wrote "read this aloud" followed by a set of odd symbols; when I looked at them my eyes burned and all I could see were the other runes, but I somehow read them anyway. The burning stopped, but now my memory is all smeared where the runes used to be.

The small giant thing didn't stay much longer after writing the glyphs, for now I know them to be such. It tried to get me to come with it, but I didn't trust it much. Then it stepped a few feet away and just sort of popped out of existence.

After it vanished I started circling the giant encampment, for I was certain the ladies were on the other side, not in the camp. It took me a long time to make my way all the way around; the circumference of that camp must have been at least fifteen miles, though it was only about a mile across. Got to love sticky places.

On the other side I found a cave, and in the cave were three ladies and the glass howler, Duke.

The first lady calls herself "Em;" she's a little younger than me, 70 or so I would guess, somewhat plain but tough and bright with a very potent, well shielded mind. Her mind tastes a bit capricious, but her actions suggest a good degree of premeditation.

The youth I saw on a pipod earlier is called "Fi" by Em but "Pohka" by Cor; she has a really sloppy cypher and seems like a joker, though no mean thinker. Rather loose, her thoughts spill all over the place, and they wander all over the place too; thoughts about vegetables, wind patterns, incantations, waterfowl, explosions. . . she's a bit fatiguing to think near, the way she splashes her brain everywhere.

Cor is the little child; she has a bit of a temper but is extremely competent and catches everything that happens. Talks better than most adults, and very self-possessed.

All three claim to know me. Cor claims I lived with her for some weeks time, and I rather think I did, though it is all a blur in my mind. When I explained the burning runes I was seeing earlier she got all excited and talked about knives and a conspiracy and things. If half the thoughts Pohka spilled all over me during Cor's rant are true, I am almost glad I have forgotten that part of my life.

Em asked me if I still had the runes burning my memory, and I said no, some big fellow had given me some glyphs to read and they had blurred away. This caught their fancy and I was compelled to explain in detail what had happened. When I got to his sort of popping away at the end of our interview Cor said excitedly,

"Come on, Em! Let's go pop after him! You know he's gone someplace exciting. . ."

"I think," replied Em calmly, "that we will join the giants instead."

"What! Why?"

"If GF had wanted us, he would have come to get us."

"But he didn't know we were here!"

"Probably he did. He could scarcely have missed the giants' camp if he came toward Mr. Graves from that direction, and they definitely knew that at least the two of you were here, since you are the ones who brought them here."

"They wouldn't have told him unless he asked," countered Cor.

"We'll find out when we ask them tomorrow morning, won't we? Anyone care for some leek stew?"

Thus concluded the business portion of the day. The chatter for the next several hours dealt with things they assure me I participated in myself, so it is sure to be in my other journals; thus, I will not record it at this time.

Day 8 since awaking:

Today we went to see the giants. It appears that Cor and Pohka are friends with them; at least, there is a certain respect between the monsters and the girls. Em seems to have won their esteem as well, but they call me "fish face" and giggle when I talk.

GF, for so the fellow I met yesterday seems to be called, did not speak with the giants about the girls; nor did he speak to them at all, being a mute. He did write them a note, however, that read as follows:

Dear sirs,

It has come to my attention that until quite recently, your kind was not known in this land. I, though only half again as large as a mere hu-

man, have frequently been called a giant, and never has report reached me of any larger humanoid. You can thus understand my surprise upon hearing of your presence.

As you are apparently unfamiliar with my script, I assume you will not read this until you come to understand my hand through diligent study. Once you do understand it, please cover the back of this sheet with as detailed a history of your people as may be. Please try to write small. Once the space is covered, burn the manuscript in a hot furnace.

Your humble servant,

—GF

When Em had read this aloud there was a bit of a stir. Em, Cor, and Fi all found themselves replying to the questions of giants at the same time, and I kind of lost the thread. Not being directly involved, Duke and I played a game of crows while the storm of words raged on. Duke's a mute, just like GF, but by far the brightest glass howler I've met.

After a time the main thrust of the talking died away and everyone seemed to be paying attention to Em. Duke played a brilliant crane and ended the game, so I also tuned in and listened to the tail end of her speech.

"... is obviously charmed, though it will take some time to trace it down. If you are willing to wait a few days I suppose I could tweak it to open a portal all of us could use, instead of just large enough for the manuscript itself, but I cannot guarantee any way back, nor do I have the expertise needed to trace its destination.

"The are, of course, several other options. We could continue on Cor's original mission and introduce you all to my home slo; I suspect the results will be somewhat mixed, but on the whole beneficial to yourselves; my countrymen may be dullards, but they are industrious dullards. We could camp here and hope for GF's return, though we have no guarantee he will return to this spot even if he does return soon. We could all go home quietly, which would please your families but seems a bit of a waste after so long a journey. We could also split up; some of us could try to follow the manuscript while others go to the slo.

"For my part, I am content to hear your opinions rather than offering my own."

Once Em had finished this, one of the giants rose and said, "we are not careful to answer you today," after which they all rose, bowed low, and turned to walk into their tents. Thus unexpectedly deprived of all our over-

sized friends, Em turned to look at Cor with unconcealed amazement.

"Yep," said Cor, "they're very formal about some things."

"Can we go join GF?" asked Pohka in excitement.

"Maybe," replied Em, "but not yet. We need to analyze this paper first. Would you and Mr. Graves mind giving me a hand?"

"Can I help too?" asked Cor.

"Well... sure, why not. Mr. Graves, are you in?"

I replied that I supposed so, and the rest of the day was spent prodding the enchantments to see how they were built. It was troubling work, for the blur left over from GF's cure frequently obscured my mind, but at least it was work and kept my mind off of my growing hunger. I'm going to have to find a mind to consume tomorrow or I won't be good for much.

After retiring to their tents, the giants resumed normal activities, but they have consistently repulsed any effort to discuss the options Em outlined. Unusual fellows; I do wish they would stop giggling at me.

Day 9 since awaking:

The votes are in, and solidarity lost.

Pohka and Duke are going to go home, and following them are three giants: one named Don the Phrontist, the oldest of the company; Mia Get, a young female who seems to possess considerable physical charms by giant standards, though I confess I don't see it at all; and Herb Gorro, Mia's current beau.

Em and Cor are going to attempt to force their way after GF using the enchantment on the manuscript he left. With them are going seven of the giants; five single young men who still have the typical young-man wanderlust and a middle-aged couple, Gar and Negak Thoris.

One solo giant will remain here. His name is not known to me, but the other giants call him The Cage. He is very tall, even for a giant, and laconic in the extreme. He has a striking, dour visage with deep-set eyes and sunken cheeks, and the two words I have heard him say ("staking it", his reply to a direct question as to what he would be doing) were spoken clearly and quietly, but cut through the air like a hot knife through butter.

The rest of the giants will be returning to their village.

My own fate is yet undecided. Pohka, Duke, and the bulk of the giants leave this morning and have spent the day helping Em decipher the enchantment and prepare her companion charms, but I don't think I want to go with her and Cor. I'm also not sure I want to stay here with The Cage, though, so I may just wander off someplace. I

really don't know.

Day 10 since awaking:

Long day working on magic with Em. It has done wonders for my mind; the blur is starting to fade, but I feel strangely disconnected from the past I am starting to remember. I apparently used to feel like a part of the Illithid of the Keep, but I don't anymore. The middle period I still cannot recall at all, though, beyond Em and Cor's description of it.

At dusk we made a bonfire, opened the portal, and the nine went through it. I had arranged to follow them, but as I went to step through I felt against it, so I merely closed the spell off instead. Now it's just me and The Cage left. He gives me the creeps; I think I'll leave tomorrow morning.

Day 11 since awaking:

I woke up this morning to see The Cage walking quickly through the trees, a live boar grasped firmly in his hands. He came up to me, crouched down, and said,

"Eat."

Again his voice cut through the air and pierced my very soul. I noticed he had cupped the body of the boar in one hand and held the mouth pinched closed, the top of its head extended toward me. Surprised but gratified, I touched it with my tentacles and ate its mind. As soon as it was dead, my companion smiled, then began to build a fire on which to roast the boar.

"Are you happy?" he asked after a time, without turning to look at me.

"Yes," I answered, "thank you very much for the meal."

He made no reply. After a short time, however, he repeated the question, "but are you happy?"

The way he said it—the way he said everything—really made me think. After thinking carefully I answered, "No, I am not very happy."

He looked at me, but made no reply, so I wandered down to the stream for a wash and a drink. When I got back he was skinning the boar and asked, without turning,

"Why not?"

"Why am I not happy?" I asked. Taking his silence as an affirmation that I had understood him correctly, I continued. "I am not happy because I don't know who I am. A few weeks ago I was happily Mr. Graves, Illithid of the Keep, teacher at Cor's school; I was a broom rider and a retired philanthropist in my own community and an accepted eccentric. Last month I knew who I was.

"Then someone stabbed me with a cursed dagger and

I forgot who I was, I forgot everything I ever was; and though I can remember most of it again, I'm not Mr. Graves anymore. I don't feel like Mr. Graves anymore."

"Good," he said immediately; since he had always paused before speaking before, I found this quite odd.

"Good? Good that I don't know who I am?"

He made no reply.

"How can it be good?" I continued. "I used to be someone; I used to be happy, friendly, useful. I used to know a lot, and know I knew it. My life was sweet, it was fun and funny and perfect. No trial could dampen me for long, because I knew myself. Now everything is spiffy and I'm not happy. How can you say that's good?"

The Cage turned and looked me in the eyes. His was a sombre face, but not really sad; there was no glee, but there was no sorrow either. He took a bite of roast boar, then another and another, all without breaking his gaze from my eyes. I found myself entranced by the calmness and purpose of his look.

After he had finished eating, he inclined his head toward this roll of inscribed leather and asked, "your journal?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Come," he said, and got to his feet, walking slowly off into the woods. At first I was going to ignore him, but after a bit I decided I might as well follow.

His goal, it turned out, was to make paper. We walked to a little marsh, picked huge bundles of fibrous reeds, walked to a stoney outcrop where he bust off huge slabs of rock, walked with them to the river and crushed and rinsed the reeds over and over. All day we were at work, and all day he made me talk; talk about me, about life, about what I remember and what I don't; he said little, just a word now and then, but what he did say cut right through me and lifted my thoughts to paths my mind does not often frequent.

The whole day has fled. Tomorrow I will have paper to write on again, and though I have no ink, I have little doubt he will see to that as well. Somehow, I think I will not be leaving after all.